

Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center
Avalanche Advisory

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Good Morning this is Oly with the avalanche advisory, valid for today, January 22nd, 2010. This report does not apply to local ski areas within the forecast region and will remain in effect through midnight, January 22nd with an outlook for January 23rd and 24th. Special thanks to Schweitzer Mountain and thanks again to everyone who made the time to add your valuable input.

WEATHER

It's sure good to get that pesky January thaw out of the way here in N. Idaho. It has its good and bad sides. The bad is that the snow level has receded out of the valleys and has had made access more difficult. Spring breakup conditions may make many of the approaches difficult or impossible if we don't get freezing nights. The good news is that in many areas and exposures the pack has consolidated, many of the weak layers have bonded and coverage is better, mainly above 5500'. It looks like the near record high temps and sunny days of this week will give way to small chances of snow across the forecast area with a greater probability by Monday. The IPNF is surrounded by winter weather watches and advisories, however. If we get more snow there probably will be another crop of surface hoar buried from last night. **You can expect the avalanche hazard to increase for the outlook period.**

Avalanche conditions for the Selkirk and Cabinet Mountains are rated as CONSIDERABLE on wind-loaded aspects greater than 35 degrees above 5,500 feet.

Natural avalanches are possible and human triggered avalanches are probable.

Avalanche conditions are rated as MODERATE on all other slopes above 5,000 feet.

Natural avalanches are unlikely, *human triggered* avalanches are possible.

Snowpack

Kevin and I had an arduous snowmobile up the Ruby Creek Drainage to the Roman Nose Lakes Area yesterday. The bridge is out and we had a shallow crossing to ford. Then we hit a patch of about a quarter mile of bare gravel. Once we hit the groomer trail at Ruby Pass our day improved. We found around 5 feet of snow with about 4" of powder on top. Excellent snow traveling conditions! Once we got there we observed several areas of natural releases above meadows that there was high marking activity in. Choosing terrain appropriate to the hazard above is a critical skill in avoiding avalanche accidents. Digging on various aspects reveal that the surface hoar layer about 16" down is hanging in there persistently. It was definitely most reactive on the northern exposures. The sliding surface was a 1 finger hardness layer that produced a clean shear. The surface hoar layers in the midpack have gained some strength but they're not gone. The old surface hoar layer over the faceted snow near the bottom is still showing signs of weakness in

shear tests as well. Our main concern today is this layer and the implications of more loading over time.

Terrain

Wind will be a factor for the next 24-36 hours so watch how the surface snow is becoming a firm slab on exposed aspects and how it is loading on lee aspects. Weak interfaces could be forming in the new snow as well. Don't discount the buried layers of surface hoar even though the snowpack has settled they're still there and could fail in steep unanchored terrain.

No report this week from the Lookout Pass or Silver Valley.

Avalanche conditions for the St. Joe Mountains are rated as CONSIDERABLE on north and wind-loaded aspects greater than 35 degrees above 5,000 feet. Natural avalanches are possible and human triggered avalanches are **probable**. **Avalanche conditions are rated as MODERATE on all other slopes above 5,000 feet.** Natural avalanches are unlikely, *human triggered* avalanches are **possible**.

Snowpack

At Landmark Mountain at 6100' Ed found the primary weak layer to be a surface hoar layer buried about 1.5 feet deep. All shear tests were producing easy to moderate results and propagation tests (ECT) were producing failure across the whole block. This is telling us this layer has not strengthened much with the settlement of the pack and large avalanches at this layer are still possible.

Terrain

His main concerns for today are for the northerly aspects where surface hoar has persisted more intact. New snow will stress this weak layer further before it begins to stabilize. There is winter weather advisory just to the South of the Joes country and more snow and wind loading could increase the hazard

The next advisory will be issued on Friday, January 29th, 2010.

If you're at Schweitzer Mountain this week and have your avalanche gear take advantage of the free avalanche beacon training at 10AM on Sunday at the Clock Tower. Schweitzer Patrol will help you hone your skills with a 1 hour free training. After that, hit the beacon park at the top of the Great Escape Quad, compliments of the Selkirk Powder Company. For a great resource for avalanche education and weather observations check out <http://www.selkirkpowderco.com/>.

The State of Idaho Parks and Recreation Department in cooperation with the IPNF-AC, is conducting (**Free**) avalanche workshops for snowmobilers this winter. The next class will be offered in Grangeville on January 22-23rd. For more information go to the Idaho Parks and Recreation Department website at www.parksandrecreation.idaho.gov, or call Marc Hildesheim, North Region Trails Specialist, at (208) 769-1511.

The Panhandle Avalanche Center in Sandpoint and Sandpoint Parks and Recreation is sponsoring free avalanche workshops for all snowgoers. "Decision Making in the Backcountry" workshops will be offered and 2/10/10. These are offered at the old

Federal Building in Sandpoint and are ***Free to the public***. For class schedules in the Silver Valley contact Dan Frigard at 783-2130. In Avery contact Ed Odegaard at 245-6209.

If you have a group or club that is interested in more education on avalanche safety we will be available for free avalanche awareness classes beginning in December, so feel free to give us a call. As usual we would appreciate hearing from anyone who happens to observe any recent avalanche activity while out in the backcountry or just wants to let us know what is going on in their area. You can reach Kevin Davis in Sandpoint by calling (208) 265-6686.

Avalanche conditions change for better or worse continually. Backcountry travelers should be prepared to assess current conditions for themselves, plan their routes of travel accordingly, and never travel alone. Backcountry travelers can reduce their exposure to avalanche hazards by utilizing timbered trails and ridge routes and by avoiding open and exposed terrain with slope angles of 30 degrees or more. Backcountry travelers should carry the necessary avalanche rescue equipment such as a shovel, avalanche probe or probe ski poles, a rescue beacon and a well-equipped first aid kit.

Have a safe and pleasant weekend.